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MUSIC REVIEWS

Heart Beats

Kid Loco's love song

BY JOSH KUN

KID LOCO
Prelude to a Grande Love Story (Atlantic)
Jesus Life for Children Under 12 Inches (Yellow Productions)

It's easy to have a crush on Kid Loco. As a French producer and remixer working mostly from a warm palette of not-your-usual samples (flutes, piano twinkles, acoustic guitars, strings, horns), he inspires intimate attachments with sonic love letters that gush bedroom romanticism. His gorgeous 1998 import-only album, *A Grande Love Story*, went down like a Euro-Harlequin novel bashfully shot as bachelor-pad porn. Unfortunately overshadowed by the stateside blowup of his fellow Parisian retro-aesthetes Air, *Grande* tried to be both stylishly handsome and stylishly blunted, an album by a fey and delicate electro dandy who couldn't get over the adolescent power of aural swank and chronic creativity.

Prelude to a Grande Love Story is a clever epilogue to its predecessor (which Atlantic couldn't release because of sample legalities) and is mostly the Kid being remixed by folks as disparate as Jim O'Rourke and St. Etienne, who both fiddle with the Pastels' Katrina Mitchell's whispered guest spot on "Love Me Sweet" (O'Rourke's track rides an especially ingenious line between the lush and the dissonant). The whole affair may be an appropriately beat-chiseled and mood-altered tour of new-school Paris club couture locking horns with indie guitar-rock and tuneful avant-gardism, but nothing holds up to *A Grande Love Story*'s seamless epic emotionalism. The best cuts on *Prelude* are the ones that haven't been messed with: "She's My Lover"'s breathy seductions and the plummeting beat-waltz of "Sister Curare."

Fact is, Kid Loco is better being the remixer than the remixed. *Jesus Life for Children Under 12 Inches* — a collection of his best makeover work now out via French import and due domestically in October — is compiled proof that meddling with other people's music can sustain itself as art. His treatments of everyone from the Pastels to Talvin Singh are so enjoyable that you don't care what the originals ever sounded like. In remix mode, Kid Loco is as recognizable as they come, and each cut feels not like some tossed-off bonus-track favor for a friend but like a carefully chosen addition to his own recombinative craft. No matter if it's Comu's ecstatic howls or Mogwai's crawling jet-engine whirs, he always shows up giving hugs of chunky, downtempo beats and arrangements that never sacrifice melodic prettiness for sequence trickery. We should all be so lucky.

Los Lobos

SMEGMA

ELEANOR HOVDA
Ariadne Music (ooDiscs)

This American composer has had her music performed by the Kronos Quartet, the California EAR Unit and other top contemporary ensembles. She has been composer-in-residence at Princeton and Yale, been celebrated in magazines like *Fanfare*. Yet her name remains unfamiliar, even to many new-music cognoscenti. *Ariadne Music* may not correct that, but it is the most textured, vibrantly colored and electrifying new-music collection I have heard this year.

All five pieces here are variations on a conceptual theme, though each has distinctive hollows and striations. In "Onyx," strings buzz and hum as they pile on top of each other. The sound has startling weight and density, and is streaked with shards of flute-sound that light up individual overtones like lightning in thunder clouds. "Song in High Grasses" could pass, at first, for program music, with the reeds and strings creating an evocative vision of undulating green fields and insects and wind. But then a hair-raising yodel-wail rises out of the backdrop, and all at once the piece becomes not a picture of grass but a meditation on it, subtle and waving and eerie.

Like so much recent Western new music, Hovda's work contains neither melody nor melodic development. But it is never static, and the title composition in particular positively seethes with event. The unpredictability of those events keeps the pieces fresh, but the stunning streaks of color in the underlying stillness provide *Ariadne Music* with its profound and disquieting depths. (Glen Hirshberg)

ROBERT REIGLE
The Marriage of Heaven and Earth (Acoustic Levitation)

SMEGMA
1973–1998 Vol. I (Pigface)

Robert Reigle's intellectualism and Smegma's anti-lectualism hit some of the same crossroads from different directions. Reigle might indulge in the occasional "text collage"; Smegma's got some "poetry." One is influenced by the Residents' *Eskimo*, the other by the Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray." Both dig Albert Ayler. Their individual improvisational wildernesses are documented on these two retrospectives covering 14 years (Reigle) and 25 years (Smegma). You might like both. I do.

The sounds that resonate strongest in Reigle's modern head are drones and high-pitched tone clusters, which you get a load of in opening and concluding versions of "The Marriage of Heaven and Earth." While the long massed sax overtones might at first remind you of brake cylinders past repair, you'll soon feel their insistent beauty, and maybe even get a sick jones to hear only that facet of the arrangement. And you can: Aware that linear soloing can distract, Reigle gives you the option, on the 1982 version, of blending or omitting his sax improvs with your balance control. (You'll sample his amazing vocabulary of reed effects on "Goodnight," anyway.) On the other hand, the musicians he collected to perform the word & music piece "Ants Eating Through Brick," the terpsichorean score "A Dance Period" and his texture-centered take on Ayler's episodic "Bells" focus a collective mind on the macrocosm. Grouped triangles and bells simulate drones; a single forceful bass note or strangled guitar chord arrives decisively. If the conductor's directions were something like "Don't play anything till you're sure it will be right," they were followed just about flawlessly.

Smegma sound like they don't take direction from anybody. But since three of them (multi-instrumentalists Amazon Bambi, JuSuk Reet Meate and Dr. IO) have been playing together for at least a couple of decades, they know how to make music that works. The noisier moments of the V.U., Beefheart and Zappa might come to mind, but the influences have faded behind a personal gestalt that can incorporate synthesizers, guitars, rubber bands, transistor radios, found objects and the recitations of Richard Meltzer ("a fresh apple core/with two/rough and tumble/toenail clippings/inserted/makes a my-t-good/weapon"). And this isn't just some absurdofest, pard. Go ahead and turn it up; it actually *sounds good*, developing a pounding groove ("The Valium Restaurant") or floating into an involving 22-minute wash that supports some truly lyrical jazz trumpet ("Adventure in Sound").

Satie-and-Xenakis aficionado Reigle has lived in the Northwest U.S. and Papua New Guinea, and is currently working on his Ph.D. at UCLA. Heading in the opposite direction, psychedelic-culture lovers Smegma departed Pasadena in 1975 and now reside in Portland, Oregon, holding jobs like municipal-warehouse attendant. Ain't no classes in the musical revolution, though. These are two hemispheres of the same uncompromised brain. (Acoustic Levitation, 1436 S. Centinela Ave., No. 4, L.A. 90025; Pigface, P.O. Box 83713, Portland, OR 97203.) (Greg Burk)

DWIGHT TWILLEY
Twilley (Copper)

Despite what certain annoying know-it-alls may tell you, hindsight isn't always 20/20. It's been nearly 25 years since he scored a No. 16 hit with "I'm on Fire," yet it's still hard to figure out why Dwight Twilley never became a household name à la Tom Petty. Both artists began their recording careers in the mid-'70s, on Leon Russell's Shelter imprint; both drew upon a similar mixture of influences from the '50s (Elvis, Buddy Holly, Everly Brothers) and the '60s (Beatles, Byrds), yet did so with enough verve to be embraced by the new-wave and power-pop movements. But even though Twilley made better records, at least at the beginning — I'll still take *Sincerely* and *Twilley Don't Mind*, his first two LPs, over *Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers* and *You're Gonna Get It* — it was Petty who became the multiplatinum seller, Petty who became the youngest member of the Traveling Wilburys, and Petty who became the recent subject of VH1's *Behind the Music*. Not that Twilley has done too badly for himself, aside from a handful of '80s hits ("Somebody To Love," "Little Bit of Love," "Girls"), he scored a decent chunk of change when Tia Carrere covered "Why You Wanna Break My Heart" on the *Wayne's World* soundtrack. But while Twilley's status as a power-pop cult hero is assured, his profile has remained so low during the past decade that *XXI*, a 1996 anthology of his work, contained a self-penned poem that read, "Roses are red/Violets are blue/I'm not dead/And there's new songs, too." It's a sentiment that definitely applies to *Tulsa*, Twilley's first album of new material since 1986. Not only is Twilley still alive, but he's firmly in touch with the very elements that made his first records so compelling. From the opening snare crack of the leadoff track, "Runnin'," *Tulsa* is awash in jangly guitars, propulsive drums and slap-back echo galore. This isn't just a by-the-numbers case of rehashing old glories, though; the hook factor is exceptionally high throughout, and only a hard-hearted, tin-eared individual could resist the emotional tug of the wistful "Little Less Love" or the Spectorian "Baby's Got the Blues Again."

"Some guys have all the luck," laments Twilley on "The Luck," but don't feel too bad for him. After all, how many other cats get to release their best album a quarter-century after their debut? Tom Petty, eat your heart out. (Dan Epstein)

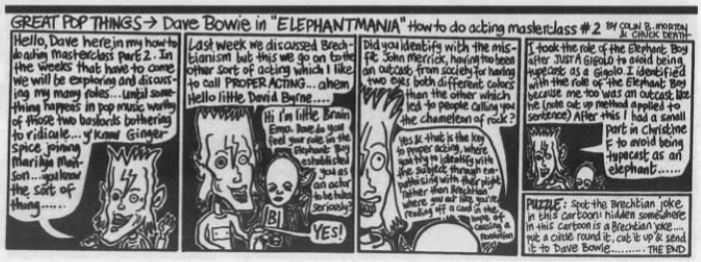
LOS LOBOS
This Time (Hollywood Records)

From the beginning, Los Lobos were — and still are — a great rock-around-the-block-party band. Always could play the *pulque* out of all that traditional Mexican music, too. And when they came up with the head-spinning sonic surrealism of *Kiko* (1992) and *Colossal Head* ('96), they became something else entirely, something that sounded like "Dear Mr. Fantasy"–era Traffic, actually. (I've seen 'em toss off a blinded-by-rainbows live version of the Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" 'cause they were playing London back in '93, so don't think these Garfield High alumni can't get psychedelic on your narrow ass.)

This album, their first for a new label, brings most everything this just-another-band-from-East-L.A. has ever done into one mixed-up, shook-up world. While the title track's lyrical reflections on past, present and future find their musical resonance in the echoes of an old soul record — Bobby Moore & the Rhythm Aces' "Searching for My Baby" comes to mind — "Oh Yeah" works out in a hand-percussion-driven Latin-funk-jazz groove like you can hear the homies playing every Sunday in Griffith Park. The bluesy guitar-rock of "Viking" is an imaginary portrait of one of those homeboys. Elsewhere, a pair of love songs ("Runaway With You" and "Why We Wish") shuffle along like Professor Longhair and Big Joe Turner, respectively. The sociopolitical "Some Say, Some Do" is appropriately bluesy, "Turn Around" is almost-straight pop, and the cautionary tale of "High Places" fuses funk-rock with psychedelic breaks.

The three songs sung in Spanish are equally eclectic. The endlessly fluid "Corazón" is a valentine in the form of a Cuban guajira. The incredibly infectious "Cumbia Rasa" is a people's anthem that's absolutely true to the popular Colombian rhythm referenced in its title. Broke-down industrial sounds and hybrid African-Latin rhythms provide the soundtrack for the "let's all go trip to the beach" storyline of "La Playa." And if that ain't a quintessential soundscape of L.A. today, then this second-generation native son doesn't know his *cabeza* from his *culo*.

With the help of three rotating guest drummers and a percussionist, David Hidalgo, Cesar Rosas, Louie Perez, Conrad Lozano and Steve Berlin have made their third album of the '90s that'll still sound totally contemporary 10, 20 years from now, when Ricky Martin and Limp Bizkit will be punch lines to bad jokes. (Don Waller)



LOS LOBOS: RUDY RODRIGUEZ; SMEGMA: MARK TRUNZ

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